UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/52/191
5 August 1997

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Fifty-second session

REQUEST FOR THE INCLUSION OF A SUPPLEMENTARY ITEM IN THE AGENDA OF THE FIFTY-SECOND SESSION

TOWARDS A CULTURE OF PEACE

Letter dated 31 July 1997 from the Permanent Representatives of Bangladesh, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, El Salvador, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, Namibia, Nicaragua, Panama, the Philippines, Senegal and Venezuela to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In accordance with rule 14 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, we have the honour to request the inclusion in the agenda of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly of a supplementary item entitled "Towards a culture of peace".

The concept of a culture of peace emerged from the International Congress on Peace in the Minds of Men, organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Côte d'Ivoire in July 1989. Increasingly since then the promotion of a culture of peace has been seen as a worthwhile objective of the international community. The evolving concept has inspired activities at so many levels and in so many regions with the full participation of civil society that the culture of peace is gradually taking on the characteristics of a global movement.

The General Assembly examined the question at its fiftieth and fifty-first sessions under the item entitled "Human rights questions" and, pursuant to its resolution 51/101 of 12 December 1996, entitled "Culture of peace", the Secretary-General in cooperation with the Director-General of UNESCO, has embarked upon the preparation of draft elements for a draft provisional declaration and programme of action on a culture of peace. The Assembly also decided, in the same resolution, to continue its consideration of the question of a culture of peace at its fifty-second session.

Considering the importance of this task and its broad and all-encompassing nature, it is proposed that the consideration of the new item take place in

plenary meeting. It is also proposed that the implementation of resolution 51/101 be examined under this new item in plenary meeting.

An explanatory memorandum in support of the above request is annexed to the present letter in accordance with rule 20 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly.

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ANNEX

Explanatory memorandum

The General Assembly discussed the concept of a culture of peace as an initiative at its fiftieth and fifty-first sessions. Within the United Nations system, the concept dates back to the Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), adopted more than 50 years ago, wherein that organization is called upon to construct the defences of peace in the minds of men because "a peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of Governments would not be a peace which could secure the unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world, and ... the peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind".

The creation of the United Nations system itself, based upon universally shared values and goals, has of itself been a major act towards transformation from a culture of war and violence to a culture of peace and non-violence. The international instruments adopted under the auspices of the United Nations, and the declarations and plans of action of its global conferences, are contributing to a culture of peace, reflecting the development and the deepening of commonly shared norms, values and aims.

The task of constructing a culture of peace requires comprehensive educational, cultural, social and civic action, in which each person has something to learn and something to give and share. It addresses all ages and all groups; it is an open-minded global strategy with a specific purpose, namely, to make a culture of peace inseparable from culture per se and to take root in people's hearts and minds. Peace is not only the absence of differences and conflicts. It is a positive, dynamic, participatory process linked intrinsically to democracy, justice and development for all by which differences are respected, dialogue is encouraged and conflicts are constantly transformed by non-violent means into new avenues of cooperation.

While the abolition of war, more than ever a scourge, must remain at the centre of the priorities of mankind, this task requires the transformation not only of its institutional structures and manifestations, but also of its deep cultural roots and of the culture of violence and war into a culture of peace.

Based on this broadest and most positive meaning of peace, a culture of peace is a set of values, attitudes, traditions and customs, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reflect and are directed towards respect for life, for human beings and their rights, the rejection of violence in all its forms, the recognition of the equal rights of men and women, the recognition of the rights of everyone to freedom of expression, opinion and information, attachment to the principles of democracy, freedom, justice, development for all, tolerance, solidarity, pluralism and acceptance of differences and understanding between nations, between ethnic, religious, cultural and other groups and between individuals.

The individual elements of a culture of peace are therefore: non-violence and respect for human rights, respect and solidarity among all peoples and dialogue between cultures, the linkage of peace to democratic participation and sustainable human development, the free flow and sharing of information and knowledge, contribution to conflict-prevention and post-conflict peace-building, and equality between women and men, all best supported through projects in which people take an active role in transforming their values, attitudes and behaviours.

An effort has been made in the above paragraphs to indicate and describe briefly what is meant by a culture of peace and in this way to make clear that while human rights questions are an important part of it, the concept also embraces other far-reaching concerns.

At its fiftieth and fifty-first sessions, the General Assembly considered the subject of a culture of peace in the Third (Social and Humanitarian) Committee, under the item entitled "Human rights questions". Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 51/101 of 12 December 1996, entitled "Culture of peace", the Secretary-General, in coordination with the Director-General of UNESCO, will report to the Assembly at its fifty-second session on the progress of activities within the framework of UNESCO's transdisciplinary project entitled "Towards a culture of peace". The report submitted under this item will also present elements for a draft provisional declaration and programme of action on a culture of peace.

It is, therefore, necessary that the General Assembly, while undertaking the formidable and complex task of elaborating a declaration and programme of action, provide its focused attention under a separate item, to be considered in plenary meeting, entitled "Towards a culture of peace".